

OUR SHORT STORY PAGE



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PART II.

(Continued.)



ALL morning the Bailey and the Blair mothers helped; Margery and Willie worked like little draught horses; and through the united efforts of them all, the garden party was actually in readiness by afternoon. The fancy table, the candy box, the lemonade well, the grab bag—all were at last realities; the ice-cream tables were scattered over the lawn; the ice cream itself, gallons of it, had arrived and was standing in the cool of the Blair cellar; and the Blair dining room looked like a bakery with its tempting array of cakes.

Long before three, Gladys Bailey might have looked on the work of her planning and seen that it was good. But by that time Gladys Bailey was too nearly worn out to pay much heed to anything. She confided to the twins that she felt one of her nervous headaches coming on, and all she could hope was to fight it off for a few hours. To add to her worry one after another of the outsiders, whom she had expected to press into service, failed her. The morning's mail brought a postal from Victoria Cummins which read: "I'm awfully sorry, but me and Elizabeth got a sore throat." Aunt Alice, not knowing her presence was counted on, sent her contribution by a messenger. Immediately after lunch, duty had called the Blair mother upstairs and was going to keep her there for some days anointing the bloated body of her child.

Even the Bailey mother had been summoned unexpectedly to town and would not be back before half past four. The Blair father would be home then; probably the Bailey father; and from that time on there would be any number of grown-ups who would assist. But for help during the evening rush there was no one to whom Gladys could turn but Margery and Willie; and they, if they realized her extremity, would realize also their chance to dictate their own terms. To give them less time for consideration Gladys put off approaching them until the last moment. A little before three she remarked, casually:

"Since Henry is sick, Willie, I wish you would take his place at the gate."

"And what shall I do?" Margery asked.

"I thought I'd let you take care of the grab bag, the candy box, and the lemonade well."

Margery looked her astonishment. "Why, aren't you and the twins going to do anything?"

"I'm going to take the fancy table and the twins the ice cream and cake."

"Better not let 'em!" Margery warned. "They'll stuff themselves sick! They always do!"

"Too late to change that now," Gladys said, cutting short the twins' denials. "The question is, will you two help?"

"If we do help," Willie Jones began, warily, "are we in it?"

Gladys was saved a direct reply by the arrival of the first guests of the afternoon, who at that moment appeared at the front gate. As a safeguard against early comers the gate had been tied shut, so Gladys knew there was still a moment's grace. The others, of course, lost their heads at once.

"Here they come! Here they come!" the twins chorused, hysterically. "Go on, Willie! Open the gate! Oh, dear, oh, dear! You're awful mean!"

By this time the crowd in front was shaking the gate amidst noisy cries of, "Hi, there! You let us in! We got tickets, we have!"

"Are—are we in it?" Willie faltered. It was as though the success or failure of the whole affair had been suddenly thrust on him and Margery, and Willie was taken too unawares to think clearly.

"We haven't time to talk about that now, Willie," Gladys said, distractedly. "We'll see later when it's over. But now, please go down to the gate. I would, only I have to stay up here."

Margery and Willie looked at each other. Surely if they did what she asked them now, Gladys Bailey would not have the nerve to refuse them full membership. Yet, on the other hand, as she had not actually promised it, it would be just like her. At this point the din at the gate—"You got to let us in! You got to let us in! Ain't we got tickets!"—became so deafening that they both lost all reasoning power and, without another word, Willie rushed down to the gate and Margery took hurried possession of her three-fold office.

Once on duty behind grab bag, candy box, and lemonade well, she had little time to speculate on the wiles of Gladys Bailey, for it poured immediately a heavy and continuous shower, almost a deluge, of beautiful, dark brown pennies. Margery was astonished at the income, the frantic eagerness with which the guests of the afternoon threw away their money. Pulling up worthless nothings from the grab bag, they would grab and grab again with all a gambler's faith in the golden opportunities of the next time.

A LITTLE GRAFT IN HOME MISSION

BY PARKER · H · FILLMORE

IN TWO PARTS.

Then they gorged themselves with molasses candy which might have been salt pretzels for the thirst, the deep, unquenchable thirst which it developed. Thirst, as ever, drove to drink—to drink at the lemonade well, of course, where to complete the circle of their folly, they swallowed in such haste that usually they choked and spluttered, and so had room for another glass, and another. What foolish creatures they were, to be sure!

So the afternoon sped by. Gladys Bailey, white and trembling, stuck to her post until relieved by her mother. Then she collapsed and a little later, supported by her father, dragged herself home. By that time there were plenty of grown-ups to help. The Blair father assumed Willie Jones's duties of gatekeeper and cashier, and Willie Jones came to Margery's assistance. By five o'clock the rush was over, and, one by one, the principals slipped off to dinner to fortify themselves against the evening, when grown-ups were expected in great numbers for cake and ice cream.

There were a few grown-ups still at the ice-cream tables and, just as Willie Jones started home, another party arrived. Margery paid little heed to them until they began rapping sharply. Then she saw they were old ladies, and like them, she wondered what was keeping the official waitress. They rapped and rapped, until Margery grew alarmed. As there was no one at that moment wishing to grab, or drink, or buy candy, Margery hurried over to the screen which stood in front of the serving table. Behind the screen a frightful spectacle was being enacted. With body bent half double and tongue hanging halfway out, Katherine was giving voice to the unmistakable signs of extreme nausea. Alice, but little better off, was pushing with unsteady hand the remains of a large chocolate cake toward the edge of the table.

"Good gracious, Alice! What's the matter?" Margery cried, rescuing the cake just in time.

"That cake," Alice gasped, beginning to cough like her sister. "Cake—ugh! ugh! I'm sick—cake—poison!"

"Of course you're sick, and good for you! You've been stuffing yourselves, both of you! I knew you would and I told her so! And there are those old ladies pounding and pounding! Oh, what shall I do!"

Alice was still making weak, ineffectual passes at the cake, and between sighs was murmuring, "Poison! Poison!"

"See here, both of you!" Margery said, sternly. "Get in the house as quick as you can! And don't you let people see you! Do you hear? If they set you they'll send a policeman and arrest you for selling poisoned cake!"

This threat was intended to hasten the departure of the twins as something had to be done, and done quickly for those impatient old ladies. The twins started off slowly, unsteadily, in the direction of the back door, and Margery rushed over to the old ladies.

"Missions, indeed!" one old lady cried, sharply, voicing evidently the sentiments of them all. "How much longer, Miss, do you expect us to wait for a dish of cream?"

"I'm awful sorry," Margery began, sweetly. "The girl who was waiting on this table got sick. They have just taken her into the house."

"Oh, well, if that's the case," the sharp old lady said, mollified at once, and noticing for the first time the breathless condition and the anxious face of the child before her. "Yes, my dear, cake and ice cream for five. And don't hurry. There's lots of time."

But Margery did hurry, for she needed lots of time to cut five slices of that hard ice cream, and also keep an eye on the grab bag, the candy box, the lemonade well. The thought of her numerous responsibilities was almost too much for her. She looked about distractedly for help. Her father had disappeared and the Bailey mother was busy with people at the fancy table. So she would have to fight it out alone.

"How do you do, Margery?" It was the voice of the Lame Lady, who was seated at a little table by herself.

"Oh, Mrs. Strong!" Margery ran toward her as to a haven of refuge. "Oh, Mrs. Strong!" she said again. Then she stopped. A strange feeling came over her. Suddenly, and for no reason she understood, she wanted to cry. She had to cry. And the next moment she was sitting on the grass, sobbing, her face against the Lame Lady's well knee.

"My dear, my dear," the Lame Lady murmured, surprised but sympathetic. "What is it, Margery?"

"It's everything! I can't do everything!" Then when she had her breath Margery continued, hurriedly. "You know Henry's swollen up as big as a horse"—the Lame Lady opened her eyes—"and Gladys Bailey's been taken home sick, and Willie Jones is eating his dinner, and Katherine and Alice just went and made pigs of themselves on chocolate cake—they always do!—and I can't—I just can't take care of the grab bag and the candy box and the lemonade well and cut ice cream and cake for all those old ladies at the same time! I—I'm tired, I am!"

"You poor child! Of course you're tired! Of course you can't do all those things alone! But we can do them between us. It won't take me long to cut ice cream for those old ladies!"

The Lame Lady reached briskly for her cane and, in what was a surprisingly short time for

her, had covered the distance to the ice-cream table. Before Margery could find enough clean plates she had the ice cream cut and also the cake. So, after all, the old ladies did not have to wait very long.

They were the last, and Margery and the Lame Lady, waiting awhile before repacking the cream, had time for a comfortable little chat. Before she knew it, Margery had told the Lame Lady about Pinkie's sad end and the Lame Lady was just as kind and sweet as Margery knew she would be. Moreover, she said the pigeons belonged to Willie Jones and if he wanted to trade them that was all right. And she said, of course Willie Jones might see the golden room. They both might every time they came. Then the Lame Lady asked about Gladys, and wanted to know whether Margery and Willie had at last been admitted to membership in Gladys's society. Margery's own fears about that had been growing.

"But don't you think she'll just have to let us in after the way we've been working?"

The Lame Lady thought she would.

"If we don't get in on that Zoo picnic," Margery began.

"The Zoo picnic, Margery?"

Then Margery had to explain about the Zoo picnic and, when the Lame Lady thought that the garden party was for the benefit of Home Missions, Margery explained about that, too. The Lame Lady seemed deeply interested and asked many questions. They grew so intimate that finally Margery invited the Lame Lady to help that evening, and the Lame Lady consented to be Gate-keeper and Cashier. Then the Lame Lady herself wondered whether Margery would like to have Richard come over and manage the cake and ice cream.

"In his white coat, Mrs. Strong?"

"Certainly."

"Oh! That would be just too stylish! We'd take the screen away so's people could see him!"

That night others beside Margery seemed to think Richard a stylish acquisition. The Bailey mother, who had never had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Strong, made herself known, and thanked Mrs. Strong in her daughter's name for the services of her colored butler. The Lame Lady declared that it was nothing at all and said that she was delighted to do anything she could for her dear friend, Margery. And Margery wondered how the Bailey mother liked that!

At the evening session, the grown-up friends and relatives of the Little Home Missionary Society assumed responsibilities and the surviving members—every one treated Margery and Willie as *bona fide* members!—did as little or as much as they liked. Afterward, Margery remembered it as a bright and happy dream. Just when it ended for her she never knew. Later she believed she stayed up long enough to hear her father begin auctioning the cakes which were left. "What am I bid?" she remembered hearing quite distinctly. Then she thought he

On the Blair father's suggestion, the meeting adjourned to Henry's room in order that the invalid might listen to proceedings. Upon Henry disease had done its utmost, and he was now an object of frightful size and color. They did not, however, see him, as it was deemed wise by those in charge to place a tall screen before his bed.

"Did you notice in today's paper," the Lame Lady remarked casually to the Blair father, "about that woman who was arrested for obtaining money under false pretenses? She said she was collecting for City Missions and some one found out that she was using the money for herself. What do you suppose will happen to her for obtaining money that way, under false pretenses?"

"Well, I suppose," the Blair father said, slowly, "she'll be arrested and fined pretty heavily, and perhaps sent to prison for a month or six months or a year. This obtaining money under false pretenses is a pretty serious business."

"What—what is false pretenses, father?" It was Alice who asked the question. She looked as though she were getting sick again. Katherine likewise had a turn for the worse.

"I'll tell you," the Blair father began, impressively. "Take, for instance, this garden party from which your little society has earned that cigar-boxful of money. Now you made this money by telling people that the garden party was for the benefit of Home Missions and the Fresh Air Fund. Isn't that so? Now then, listen: If, instead of turning this money over to Home Missions and the Fresh Air Fund you were to spend it some other way—on candy, or trolley rides, or a picnic—then people would say that you had obtained the money under false pretenses."

"And—and would we be arrested?" The twins looked positively ill, and even Gladys Bailey was startled.

"Yes, if you did that you would certainly make yourself liable to arrest and to trial at the Juvenile Court."

Margery made a rush to her father's arms. "We ain't in it!" she cried. "Sure we ain't! Me and Willie Jones only helped!"

Gladys Bailey looked at her scornfully. "You are in it! And if we're arrested you and Willie Jones'll be the first, because you two sold all the tickets and did all the work!"

"We ain't either!" Willie Jones retorted. "You said we'd talk about it later, and now it's later and now we don't want to be in it. We wouldn't be in it if you asked us to! Little Home Missionary Society! Shucks! Little Home Missionary Society nothing!"

The Blair father and the Lame Lady were like the unconscious actors in a play during a long aside to the audience. They did not seem even to hear much less understand what was going on. The Lame Lady now remarked blandly:

"So the question before the house is the division of proceeds. The net profits amount to \$21.16. My congratulations to the members of



"Do you think we're going to sell your old tickets if we're not in it?"

continued. "For this fine chocolate monkey," which was, of course, absurd.

IV.—The Appalling Peril of False Pretenses.

On Sunday morning the Blair father and the Lame Lady cast up accounts together and by afternoon were ready to make a report. So a meeting was called at the Blair home. The twins by this time had so far recovered the effects of their debauch that the only traces left were a slight paleness of cheek and a quiet reserve of manner. Gladys Bailey, walking with the slow and virtuous air of convalescence, was herself again, though her face still looked pinched and white.

the society! You have done very, very well. Now half the money's to go to Home Missions, is it not? and half to the Fresh Air Fund. That is what I understood when I contributed to the garden party."

The twins gave a faint sigh of relief. Through the Lame Lady's misunderstanding of the situation they would not, after all, be arrested. What a narrow escape! They relaxed as though after a strain. But Gladys Bailey jumped up, bright-eyed and tense. Two little spots of color came into her cheeks and she spoke with sharp distinctness:

"Then, Mrs. Strong, you didn't understand right!" The twins gave one frightened, protesting "Oh!" but Gladys continued: "It was for

the benefit of the Little Home Missionary Society. That's us, and we'll do what we want with the money!"

"Exactly, my dear. I knew I understood aright. It's for the Home Missionary Society, and that's what you want to do with the money. But if you had enough, you know you said you'd share with the Fresh Air Fund."

"I say it's for the Little Home Missionary Society," Gladys repeated in a raised voice.

"So," continued the Lame Lady, amiably, dividing the net profits equally would make \$10.58 for Home Missions and \$10.58 for the Fresh Air Fund. That's right, isn't it, Willie?"

Willie Jones thought it was.

"Therefore the motion before the house is that we send \$10.58 to Home Missions and \$10.58 to the Fresh Air Fund. Are we ready for the vote?"

"Very well," said Gladys Bailey, significantly. "Let us put it to vote."

There was a "wow-wow-wow" behind Henry's screen, and in a moment the Blair mother emerged to say that Henry felt too sick to vote. Gladys Bailey's face fell. Then she turned a bright, piercing gaze on the twins. There was no mistaking her meaning. But their father was also looking at them, and with such an odd expression that the twins grew wretchedly self-conscious and began to fidget their fingers and to rub together their feet.

"I—I feel sick, too," Katherine gasped. "I don't believe I can vote."

"My head aches so," Alice murmured. "I don't believe I can vote."

Suddenly Willie Jones gave Margery a wink. The Lame Lady saw the wink, but it is not to be presumed that she understood what it meant. After the wink Willie Jones demanded, fearfully:

"Now, Gladys Bailey, once for all: Are we in it or ain't we in it?"

Stamping her foot, Gladys Bailey gave instant answer: "You are in it! Both of you; And you can't get out of it!"

"All in favor of this motion"—the Lame Lady skillfully drew them back to business—"signify the same by raising their right hands."

Willie Jones's right hand flew up, followed by Margery's. There was a wicked little grin on Willie Jones's face and his lips formed a mocking syllable—"Stung!" or "Strunk!" or something of the sort—while the Lame Lady announced:

"The motion is carried. All that remains," she continued, "is to write two letters to accompany the money. The President of your society might write them and you can all sign your names."

The Lame Lady deferred pleasantly to Gladys Bailey. But Gladys was not to be won so easily as that. Flushed and defiant, she burst out abruptly:

"My father—he says that all the old Charities and Mission Societies are nothing but graft anyhow!"

"Yes, my dear, there's a great deal of graft in the world," (Gracious! was the Lame Lady positively deaf!) "There are undoubtedly many unprincipled people who represent themselves as working for Charities and Missions and so impose on the public. Like the woman we were talking about a little while ago. So those of us who are honestly interested in such organizations have to be very careful. When people come to me and say they want money for such and such a charity, I telephone the headquarters of the charity and if I find that they are not working for the charity but are out for themselves, I report the matter to the police. Yes, Gladys is right; there are people who try to make a graft of Charities and Missions."

Once or twice Gladys opened her mouth to interrupt. But what was the use? If everything you say is twisted around until it means the exact opposite—

"And since all of you are interested in Charities and Missions in the right way," the Lame Lady went on after a moment, "I wonder would you help me in a little thing I have on hand for the week after next. I am one of a group of ladies who take turns during the summer in giving day outings to the children of the Orphanage. This year we go to the Zoo. There will be a large bus and plenty of good things to eat. It would help me greatly if all of you could come, for you know I can't run very lively."

"O-o-oh! Wasn't the Lame Lady the most wonderful woman on earth! Not satisfied with getting the best of Gladys Bailey, she must needs have a whole new set of other beautiful tricks! Margery gazed at her in abject adoration. Yes, her father was the most wonderful man and the Lame Lady was the most wonderful woman. That was all there was about it."

A similar approval went the rounds. Willie Jones shook his head as though to say, "Yes, she is—she's all right." From behind the screen came a long grunt from Henry. He could be fully recovered by the week after next. Even the twins revived somewhat and began sending furtive, conciliatory glances toward their old leader.

The Lame Lady herself was again deferring, gently, kindly, to Gladys Bailey. That young woman was busied in some lightning calculations of her own. Before the pause grew awkward she had the answer.

"Thank you, Mrs. Strong," she said, in her sweetest society manner. "We'll be delighted to help you."

Once again Gladys lifted high her head. The look of command returned. Already one could see her, as no doubt, she saw herself, marshaling relays of orphans now through the monkey house, now to the pony track.

"And the two letters, Mrs. Strong; I'll have them written and signed by tonight. And perhaps, as you think the cause of our society is false pretenses, we better change it. After this we'll call ourselves the Little Elks."

And Willie Jones remarked confidentially to his neighbor: "I just tell you what, Margery, no more false pretenses in mine. It's too dangerous!"